

TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING PROFESSION VALUES IN INDONESIA AND IN THE US

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As it is known, education functions not only to transmit knowledge from teachers as educators to students as subjects of learning, but also to instill norms and moral values so that students may behave accordingly in the society. In this context, schools, colleges and universities are leading sectors which play their important roles to achieve this goal. It is not easy to realize the goal of education wherever it is as there are many concerns and values of educational practices which always emerge and need to be taken into consideration by all.

In this paper, I would like to highlight some practical ideas on comparing the educational values and practices in Indonesia and the United States (US) and then make a recommendation that may be helpful for public education. Some book references, class discussion, motion pictures, experiences and current situation observation are the subjects involved in the accomplishment of this paper.

In educational contexts, teachers are subjects to the better quality of education. Many assume that professional teachers would bring prosperity to public and nation in terms of education excellence. Since the past until current times, policy makers and teachers educators have been consistent with the formulation that teaching requires basic skills, content knowledge, and general pedagogical skills (Shulman, 1987). This

implies that teacher as profession needs not only cognitive but also pedagogical skills that deal with how to teach and teaching attitudes. Teachers are to be the role model of students. A Javanese popular proverb in Indonesia “*Guru: Digugu lan Ditiru* / Teacher: to be trusted and imitated” leads into an understanding that whatever acts teachers do will be taken into consideration by students. Hence, becoming a teacher really needs high quality of personnel in terms of cognitive, pedagogical and interpersonal aspects.

Preparing students for becoming teachers has been important concern for the government in Indonesia and the US. The teacher education structure existing in both countries has been designed in such a way that meets the need of each. In the US, teacher education requires students to gain more knowledge and skills as well as adaptation through school observation and experiences from the early period of education. From the class discussion, I learned that students in the US should take the early field placement on the first / second year by direct visits and observation in schools. This really benefits students as they may get much exposure of the nature of teaching before determining which subject or program they will take later. Middle placement on the third year that may form in micro teaching or videotaping really helps students to meet the real practice of teaching. In addition, the student teaching which lasts for 8 – 15 weeks on the fourth year also plays significant role in instilling the teaching values, knowledge and skills for them to experience real teacher world.

In Indonesia, the structure of teacher education is almost similar with that in the US. What makes it different is that there is no early field experience that students should take on the first / second year. In this situation, Indonesian students will learn the theories and skills of teaching since the first until the third year of the program. No

direct visit or observation to schools is compulsory for them on the first and second year. In most teacher programs in Indonesia, students teaching runs for 3 months (12 weeks) in public or private schools, and some even more. This period is longer than that in the US which requires at least 8 weeks of student teaching. If in the US, only public schools are used for students' practice, in Indonesia both public and private are used to provide students various environments to learn from. To my concern, the longer the students' teaching practice and the more varied the schools used for practice will provide more opportunity for students to gain as much knowledge and skills as possible and learn from different resources that assist them a lot on becoming a good teacher.

Teachers are subject to expertise on their fields. However, sometimes teachers are assigned to handle classes on which they have had no training. This happens both in the US and Indonesia. Taken for an instance is a social studies teacher might be assigned a science or mathematics course, which means endless hours of preparation (Spring: 2008, p.254). This overwhelming situation occurring in the US also happens in Indonesia for many occasions, even today. Many teachers teach subject matters on which they have no sufficient training. This is usually due to the lack number of teachers that schools have or other difficult situations encountered such as sudden teacher mutation and leave which sometimes become considerations that lead school officials to take this decision. Lesmana, M and Riza R (2009) figures out a common example of this situation in which a teacher – known as Muslimah – has to teach the students so many subjects in class. Mathematics, science, arts and many others were the subjects that she has to deal with regardless that she is not majoring on those different

subjects. All these situations definitely break the rule that a teacher should only be assigned to teach classes of his expertise or background.

Parents' choice in sending their children to study at schools is another interesting matter to discuss. Mostly, parents will think of school's status (private or public), tuition, academic quality, and the religious values taught in schools as their basic considerations. In Indonesia, public school is highly preferable for most parents for some concerns. In his study in Malang, Bjork (2005) states that private institutions tended to be back-up choices for students who were not accepted at the public schools of their choice. This is currently true as public schools are cheaper than the private ones and offer better academic quality in common. Though some elite private schools occupy high academic excellence, particularly those which are connected to religious foundation, they charge tuition that may not be affordable for public in general. Thus, only parents who are economically established may send their children to study at those schools.

Similarly, the US parents will also consider academic quality, particularly the test scores of high-stakes test in sending their children to school. Whether the school is public or private is not really a matter, I think, for parents with high income. Even, for years, many Americans have thought that private schools are generally superior to public schools and that this superiority is confirmed by studies showing the higher achievement of students who attend the former (Berliner, 1995). Though some reasons from study such as that private schools are able to select students whom they enroll and expel, and their focus and efforts on core subjects answer the public curiosity, but many still believe that private schools are better than the public ones. To my understanding, this is an interesting trend of education nowadays that happens not only in the US but

also Indonesia. What the public are seeking for is academic excellence that schools offer to their children. Tuition will not be such a big matter for parents as long as schools can meet and satisfy their demands. Parents, particularly those the educated ones, will mostly seek for high quality schools that may guarantee excellent education to their children, no matter how high the tuition is. Private schools, the elite ones, seem to provide an answer to parent's demands for these current and coming times.

Finally, the value of teachers' professionalism is also good points to discuss. Until nowadays, many Indonesian teachers in general still show some unprofessional acts in their daily basis. Beeby (1979) illustrates that coming late to teach, ending the class earlier than schedule, talking about unimportant things in office during spare times, less concern in marking and returning students' worksheets are some examples that occur in Indonesian teachers in general. Such habits seem to fossilize in them that make them difficult to release from. In addition, the system of performance evaluation on the basis of loyalty, work performance, responsibility, obedience, honesty, cooperation and initiative tend to be misleading in the teachers' evaluation. It applies to all Indonesian civil servants including majority of teachers. Indonesian civil service culture, in sum, promotes values and behaviors that are fundamentally at odds with the new role of teacher that the government is currently promoting (Bjork, 2005). This is in contrast with the American teachers in general that show high discipline and more responsibility in their jobs. From the class discussion, we know that many American teachers will come early to classroom to prepare all things needed for the class running. They will start and finish the class exactly as scheduled. They also spend their spare time to do some other teachers' works such as grading and correcting instead of chatting with friends in the office.

From all the discussed issues, I attempt to make some notes to provide some considerations or little references to improve the education quality nowadays. Firstly is dealing with teacher, teacher education program and teacher work. A teacher, as proposed by Shulman (1987) needs to have basic skills, knowledge and pedagogical skills. Thus, the efforts of preparing teacher education should be on the basis of these elements. Student teachers should be equipped with lots of pedagogical aspects integrated in the curriculum both in theories and practices. As a consequence, subject matters that explore on how to teach within diverse approaches need to be more developed and exposed. Learning services through student teaching in schools assisted by senior teachers also plays significant role to produce good teachers. I am thinking that student teachers should be given longer time and various fields of practices, not only in public but also private schools. This situation will challenge students (in Indonesia and the US) to do more adaptation of various environments they will come in future times. In addition to the improvement, teacher recruitment also needs to be well carried out. As teachers in Indonesia are civil servants who recruited based on the *seleksi calon pegawai negeri sipil* (civil servant recruitment test), the process which ignores the values of pedagogical skills should then be reformed. It is a fact that the test only measures the cognitive and psychological aspects of candidates regardless the pedagogical ones. Thus, it is not surprising that many Indonesian teachers have been found to lack teaching competence (Azra, 2002 in Zulfikar, 2009).

In addition, the teacher work assignment nowadays particularly in villages, in which many Indonesian teachers teach the subject matters on which they have no sufficient trainings or backgrounds needs also to reevaluate. Many teachers in primary education and secondary education there teach what they had not learned before. This is

of course mistaken as it influences the achievement of students and schools. The best alternative is then requiring teachers to teach subjects of their expertise. This sounds difficult as lots of constraints may be encountered, but if it is not immediately controlled, then how quality education is achieved?

Considering that many parents are now not reluctant to send their children to study in private schools is good point. This indicates that private schools in some cases offer something which is different and even superior to that in the public ones. The public demand is now obvious that parents seek for quality education for their children instead of ordinary one. They do not mind to pay much tuition to schools which guarantee excellent education. The government now then is demanded to pay more concerns on how education in public and private schools offer good quality education. As money plays important role in this context, then there should be regulation that balance the parents' spending with what they get from schools. I am afraid that if it is not treated, there may be misleading policies schools take that disadvantage public expectation. They charge lots of money but with no balance with quality education they are promoting if not governed by regulations.

Teachers' professionalism on their duties is the last point that I emphasize. Many facts and resources state on how unprofessional acts have been fossilized in most Indonesian teachers. Discipline, innovation and responsibility have been the matters that are always discussed for many times but no significant improvement made. I am thinking of the reform of teacher performance evaluation that should be distinguished from that of other professions. Currently, all teachers as they are civil servants are evaluated based on the same format that measures the loyalty, work performance, responsibility, obedience, honesty, cooperation and initiative. These aspects apply to all

civil servants in Indonesia regardless teachers' creativity and hard working in performing their job. Thus, specific measurement that deals much with how a good teacher should perform is badly needed. And I believe this is the government authority that should be well considered and implemented to improve the education quality in Indonesia. Besides, the dual status that Indonesian teacher possesses: educators and civil servants, needs also be given emphasis. Teachers should be aware that they are educators that should perform the best to students instead of showing obedience to the government. This is a challenge that should be well considered to eliminate the fossilization of unprofessionalism among teachers. Prospective teachers who also act as the agent of change will be one subject to this improvement.

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